**God’s Perfect Place**

Revelation 22

Last week we studied **Revelation 21** and John’s vision of the Bride of Christ - ***God’s people perfected*** - with our remaining sin finally removed, with the righteousness of Jesus forever realized in us and our relationship with God fully restored. The heavenly city - the New Jerusalem - comes down from heaven and merges with the new earth. The separation between God and Man that was caused by the fall of Adam and Eve will be repaired! The curse on the world will be removed!

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” Revelation 21:1

Notice the ***continuity and DISCONTINUITY*** here! Our eternal dwelling place will be NEW - a massive upgrade over our current experience. But eternity will also be FAMILIAR - it will be earth, albeit a new earth. Some thing will be removed entirely, like the chaos and evil represented in the Sea. But other things will remain, just in an upgraded form - like us, with our mortal bodies clothed with immortality and the glories of Jesus shining in and through us unhindered.

The last two chapters of the Bible go back and forth in describing the eternal state between ***what will NOT be there and what WILL be there***. So we will see three REMOVALS and three RENEWALS - three painful realities God will remove when eternity begins; and three joyful realities God will renew to their maximum as we step into glory. First, the removals.

**What Will Not** **Be There:**

* **Evil** (Sea)

“The first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” Rev. 21:1

Each removal and each renewal is presented as a dramatic symbol. This first removal is shown as the Sea. Now, don’t panic, this doesn’t mean there will be no beaches or oceans in the new heaven and earth. Those will be part of the renewal of all things - so the sharks will all be friendly and the jellyfish won’t sting and the waves will always be just right and the sun won’t burn our skin anymore.

The first thing God will remove from the new heaven and earth is **SYMBOLIZED by the Sea** - ***chaos and evil***. In ancient times there was nothing more terrifying than the open sea. Most seafaring people stayed close to shore because you couldn’t predict the weather and if a severe storm swept in and you were exposed in a sailing vessel, most of the time you were never heard from again.

The **Apostle Paul** himself suffered three shipwrecks, one account detailed in Acts 27 shows how close to death everyone on board was. And even the relatively small ***Sea of Galilee*** had four seasoned fishermen convinced they were all going to die when a terrible storm suddenly caught their small vessel out in the open. When Jesus silenced that storm with a word of command, why was that miracle so striking to Peter, James, John and Andrew? They fell on their knees saying, ***“Who is this that the wind and the waves obey him?”***

God alone can calm a storm. When **Jonah** ran away from God’s assignment, the only way to stop the storm that caught up to him was to throw the rebellious prophet overboard, directly INTO the storm. Only then did the waves calm down, as Jonah said they would.

When God created the universe, Genesis 1 verse 2 says, ***“The Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the deep.”*** That isn’t a scientific statement about the order in which everything was made - it is **a THEOLOGICAL statement** about God’s sovereignty over evil and chaos. In other words, in the beginning, when God first created, there was no evil or chaos in the world - the Spirit of God was subduing and controlling it.

In the new heaven and earth, it won’t just be that the Spirit is restraining the chaos in the world, for all evil and chaos and destruction will be removed - completely. “The sea was no more.”

Arguably the most chaotic and evil force on earth is the sin within PEOPLE - and Revelation repeatedly emphasizes that sinners will be cast out of God’s eternal paradise.

**What Will Not** **Be There:**

* **Evil** (Sea)

“As for the cowardly, the faithless… the sexually immoral… and all liars, their portion will be in the lake of fire.” Rev. 21:8

There is ***a recurring contrast*** between the saints who will rejoice in the new heaven and earth and the sinners who will not be allowed in.

**What Will Not** **Be There:**

* **Evil** (Sea)

“Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false.” Rev. 21:27

This is one of the central purposes for the whole book of Revelation - it is ***a global call to repentance!*** It is **an invitation** to have your robes washed in the blood of the Lamb so you can be including in His Book of Life and gain entry to His eternal home. Jesus calls all the thirsty to “Come and drink of His limitless living water.” Yet it is also **a warning** to all who refuse to call on His name for salvation - sin must be punished and those who do not bear the seal of God on their foreheads will instead wear the mark of the beast and will be condemned along with their diabolical leader.

The first REMOVAL will be chaos and evil, including all sinners. Here is the second removal.

**What Will Not** **Be There:**

* Suffering (**Curse**)

“Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore… No longer will there be anything accursed.” Rev. 21:4; 22:3

When Adam and Eve sinned, God - in His mercy - did not curse them directly, but ***redirected His curse to the GROUND***. The whole world has been groaning under the affects of the fall - struggling under this curse, and the consequences of sin. God told Adam and Eve, “in the day you eat of this fruit you will surely die.” Again, in His mercy, God did not strike them dead the instant they ate the forbidden fruit, but ***death began working in them and in the world*** in that very moment.

The Fall of man was the fall of the whole world - the earth was broken at its foundation and the cracks have been spreading to every corner of our experience since that time. Disease, natural disasters, predators, poison, thorns, droughts - all the problems we are so very familiar with - were unleashed when Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden.

Think about **what is broken in our world**.

* ***The earth itself*** is damaged and off kilter - as we see with hurricanes and wildfires, with tornadoes and regional droughts.
* ***The human body*** is on a slippery slope to suffering and death. If a microscopic virus that used to cause the common cold can bring the nations of the world to a standstill, we are indeed terribly fragile.
* But the most broken piece of this cursed world is ***the human heart.*** The primary curse that fell on people after the sin of Adam was the sinful nature that has been embedded inside of us every generation since Cain and Abel.

The worst suffering we experience is ***from other people***. The most painful words, the most devastating events come at the hands of sinful people. And often your greatest enemy is the sin in your own heart - just as my greatest enemy is the sin in my heart.

So hear these **words of comfort** in Revelation 21 and 22: all evil and suffering will be removed from the new heaven and earth. We will never mourn again. We will never weep again. We will never experience pain again. “The former things have passed away.” The curse of the fall will burn itself out as the wrath of God is poured out on the world and the whole place goes up in smoke. But from the ashes of this broken world God will make a new heaven and a new earth that will be totally unstained, uncorrupted, uncursed.

Last week we were amazed by the glory that will be revealed IN US - when Jesus comes back and we are LIKE HIM for we see Him as He is. Today we marvel at the wonders of the new creation. Not only will there be ***no sin IN YOU*** - but there won’t be any sin ***AROUND YOU either.***

* Imagine your **marriage** - with all selfishness and pride removed. It won’t be hard to say “I’m sorry anymore,” nor will there be any need to do so! You won’t have to work hard at communication because misunderstanding and insensitivity will be gone. You will feel total peace - perfect patience - unwavering affection - untainted devotion.
* Apply that to ***EVERY RELATIONSHIP!*** No more conflict, no more cutting words - only the sarcasm that is purely funny and not even a little bit rude. Men and women will finally understand each other perfectly! Well, that might take half of eternity, but we will get there eventually!
* Imagine **WORK** without the curse. Yes, there will be work to do in eternity. There was work in the Garden, there will be work in the new heaven and earth. But no more thorns and thistles - no more frustrations and obstacles. No more annoying co-workers. No more fickle bosses you just can’t ever understand much less please. You’ll be able to use your unique gifts and abilities to serve the Lord and improve the world! Fulfillment - purpose - productivity - JOY!
* Imagine **LIFE** without the curse. So much of life is tainted by sadness. You celebrate a wedding but wonder what lies ahead for the couple if there is more “for worse… for poorer… in sickness.” You rejoice when a baby is born but worry about the pressures that child will face in this harsh world. You celebrate an anniversary but have to grit your teeth over the fight you had minutes before guests arrived. There is a shadow over EVERYTHING in this world - it’s called the curse. It’s around us and in us.

But not in eternity! All sadness and suffering, all sin and evil will be GONE forever. Honestly we can’t really imagine it. We have to accept by faith it will be better than we can dream. Evil gone. Suffering gone. One more removal. This is the big one.

**What Will Not** **Be There:**

* **Death** (Night)

“And death shall be no more… and there will be no night there.” Rev. 21:4,25

Three powerful ***symbols of evil*** - the Sea, the Curse and now even NIGHT, darkness itself will be driven out by the light of God’s glory and goodness. Right now we walk “through the valley of the shadow of death.” Then we will walk in the direct light of God’s own presence!

The ultimate darkness is the shadow of **death**. It is the ultimate unknown, the great universal fear. Everything in our world dies. Everything breaks down. It’s the fundamental law of physics - entropy. Imagine a world without entropy! Your car doesn’t break down. Your body doesn’t break down. Your marriage doesn’t break down. Your house, your city, your yard - everything we know deteriorates - it gets overrun with weeds, things rust and decay.

Not in the new earth. Even death itself will come untrue. ***Animals will live in perfect peace and harmony*** - no more predators. No more fear of alligators or snakes. Yes, this means the vegetarians win for eternity, but I think there are good odds that there will be a Bacon Tree somewhere to be found, maybe one for pork chops and another for T-Bones.

When I daydream about eternity I imagine riding on the back of a huge pterodactyl - making the Avatar ride an actual experience. And I imagine playing with Bengal Tigers like stuffed animals - wrestling with panthers and cheetahs like we do with our dogs now. No more fear. No more danger. Above all, no more DEATH.

Nighttime represented danger, fear, uncertainty. City gates were closed at dusk to prevent the threat of a midnight attack. The holy city of God will not ever close its gates because there will be nothing left to fear!

Apply this to YOURSELF. ***How strong are your personal defenses?*** How fortified are the gates to your heart and mind? We learn over and over again not to trust people, not to open up. You let someone in, in an unguarded moment, and they could hurt you. So you build up those defenses - you build strong walls to keep people at a safe distance. Why? Because we are afraid of attack - ultimately we are afraid that the people closest to us can hurt us the most.

All of that will be gone when eternity begins. Night will be gone. Darkness will be gone. Death will be gone. It is the last enemy to be placed under the feet of Jesus. But when He comes back, even death will submit to His sovereign rule.

Three removals - evil, suffering and death. Now let’s turn to the **RENEWALS** - the three inspiring UPGRADES in the new heaven and earth!

**What Will** **Be There:**

* **God** (Throne)

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God.” Rev. 22:1

Picture the glorious **THRONE OF GOD** right now. If we saw it right now, we’d all be dead. In our current state, the holiness of God would kill us. “No one can see God and live.” UNTIL - that is - God makes all things new. Once we are perfected, once we are glorified, we will be prepared to see God face to face. And then He will move in for good.

But right now ***God’s throne is impossibly distant from us***. It is in the spiritual realm, an inaccessible dimension. It’s not just on the other side of the galaxy - it’s on the other side of REALITY.

Now, ***Christians who die, go directly to the throne of God!*** “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” There is no waiting room, no heavenly lobby, not cryo-sleep for the dead. When your believing loved one closes her eyes in this world, she opens them in the holy presence of her Savior and Jesus leads her directly to the throne of God the Father.

But for those of us still stuck here on earth, God’s throne is a glorious mystery. And God’s presence throughout history has only been seen from a distance. The fire by night and the cloud by day were symbols of God’s presence - not His actual glory. The shekinah glory that came down on Mount Sinai in the form of a great thunderstorm was again, a sign of God’s power and holiness, not His actual presence. Same with the glory of the Lord that filled the temple when Solomon prayed - the blinding cloud was a symbol - a physical manifestation God’s people were able to see to show them what God is LIKE, not to allow them to actually see Him.

Only Moses was given a small glimpse of the glory of God - and even he could only see God’s back. The presence of God was primarily symbolized in the tabernacle and the temple - with outer courts, and inner places, shrouded in mystery, filled with incense, and protected by hundreds and thousands of sacrificial offerings. The whole temple system was designed to keep people AWAY from God’s holy presence. But look at the radical transformation in the New earth:

**What Will** **Be There:**

* **God** (Throne)

“I saw no temple in the city, for the temple is the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb.” Rev. 21:22

For all of eternity there will not be a TEMPLE for people to visit once in a while. EVERYWHERE will be God’s temple, for God Himself will be EVERYWHERE - visible, accessible, walking with us, living among us.

Think of it - no walls, no signs to keep people out. No barriers. Just open doors. Just never-ending LIGHT.

**What Will** **Be There:**

* **God** (Throne)

“The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” Rev. 21:23

Right now **the sun** is the center of our solar system - everything literally revolves around the sun, which gives light and life to our tiny planet. We depend on that flaming ball of steadily burning gas for our existence. But the light of our sun will be irrelevant in the new earth, because God Himself will be our center. He will give us light directly.

***What will be the defining feature of eternity?***

If you think your main experience in “heaven” will be playing with ***animals***, think again. If you think the best part of eternity will be a reunion with ***loved ones***, think again. If you think the greatest gift of the new earth will be your new, healthy, ***resurrected body***, I have news for you.

Eternity will be filled with endless blessings, surprises and opportunities. But the central thing - the defining feature, the blessing that will fuel all the other blessings - is **GOD HIMSELF**.

The centerpiece of the new heaven and earth is the THRONE OF GOD. And the incredible promise of the book of Revelation is that the Throne of God will be right in the middle of US.

**What Will** **Be There:**

* **God** (Throne)

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. “Rev. 21:3

John’s vision has seen the throne of God from a distance. Over and over ***John saw “heaven opened”*** and glimpsed different scenes of what is happening around the glorious throne of God. 24 elders falling down in worship. 4 freaky living creatures. An uncountable multitude from every tongue and tribe and nation.

***The Bible gives us glimpses like this*** - from when Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden to the words God spoke through the prophets to the Exodus and then Mount Sinai and all the way to these last two chapters in Revelation. Glimpses.

But then He will be **WITH US**. We will see God. We will walk with Him. He will pick us up and hold us close. He will DWELL WITH US. His throne will not be lofty and distant, it will be right in the middle of heaven’s town square.

For all of eternity, evil, suffering and death will be gone - because ***GOD WILL BE THERE***. Evil cannot be in His holy presence. Where God is there cannot be pain or sadness for He is healing and life and love and joy. Look at what flows directly from the throne of God.

**What Will** **Be There:**

* Life (**Water**)

“The river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Rev. 22:1

Jesus promised His followers that ***springs of living water*** would flow from INSIDE US - a promise that was fulfilled with the outpouring of **the Holy Spirit**. What we have spiritually now we will have physically for eternity to a degree beyond our comprehension.

***The Holy Spirit Himself is a DEPOSIT***, guaranteeing the full INHERITANCE. This verse shows us that full inheritance - when we can not just sip from the fountain of living water, but we can DIVE IN.

Oh, we are so **thirsty** now, aren’t we? This broken, barren desert of a world makes us long for our eternal home. We were not made for this place, but for that one. That is where we will be home with the Lord. Nothing in this dark world is bright as crystal - not even crystal. Everything is dull, pale, opaque. Even diamonds have flaws. Even the purest water has particles - just ask my wife. I gave up on the ***bottled water*** battle a long time ago. Why spend money on bottles when the tap water is so clean and fresh? Even the cold, filtered water direct from the fridge is not good enough.

Everything in this world is tainted, polluted - especially our fellowship with God. You and I bring sin, distraction and idolatry into the relationship, so we cannot experience the full joys of God’s life flowing into and around us. We block the flow. Oh, but when our remaining sin is finally removed, we will rush into that fountain and drink, drink, drink. Look back in chapter 21.

**What Will** **Be There:**

* Life (**Water**)

“To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.” Rev. 21:6

You cannot buy water this clean and refreshing - this water of life only comes as a **free gift** of the grace of God - received by faith in Jesus Christ. ***To be thirsty is to know your need*** - to know that nothing in this world can satisfy the longing of your soul.

***Oh, we snack***, don’t we? We sip the Mountain Dew and Red Bull of this world - or the Starbucks and Jack Daniels if you want to be more graphic. But even the best stuff in this world leaves us thirsty. Even the best marriage can’t satisfy your soul’s longing for love. Even the best children can’t meet your need for purpose and legacy. Even the best job can’t bring the fulfillment your soul longs for.

Brother, sister - ***are you thirsty?*** That’s a great sign. If you don’t feel a longing for heaven - a deep and desperate desire for more of JESUS - then you may have become too comfortable in this world.

But the good news of eternity just keeps getting better. It’s not just the water of life that is there.

**What Will** **Be There:**

* Life (**Water**)

“Also, on either side of the river, the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.” Rev. 22:2

The tree of life was there in the Garden - Adam and Eve could have eaten of that tree and lived forever. But when they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God had to keep them from getting back to **the tree of life** - lest they eat from it and live forever in their sinful state. Only when our sin is fully removed will we be safe to eat again from that tree. And this is some tree! One tree, called the tree of life, but somehow growing on both banks of the river and somehow bearing ***different fruit every month***.

The water represents life, the fruit represents life - ***variety, abundance, satisfaction*** - LIFE - coming directly from God’s throne, from His presence.

I quoted C.S. Lewis when we started the Foundations series back in August, so it’s fitting to come back to Lewis now as we finish the Finale series.



“The whole dance or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each of us… each one of us has to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made. Good things as well as bad, you know, are caught by a kind of good infection. If you want to get warm you must stand near a fire: if you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them. They are not a sort of prize which God could, if He chose, just hand out to anyone. They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very center of reality. If you are close to it, the spray will wet you: if you are not, you will remain dry. Once a man is united to God, how could he not live forever? Once a man is separated from God, what can he do but wither and die?” 153, *Mere Christianity*

***God is LIFE, He is LOVE, He is JOY*** and peace and every other good thing. The only way to really have and experience those things is to have and experience God. God cannot give you true life and love and joy apart from Himself. It is a package deal.

This is why God can’t just “let people into heaven.” It just doesn’t work that way. First of all, non-Christians wouldn’t like heaven - they wouldn’t WANT to be there. I extend this description from Lewis to imagine a CAT IN THE OCEAN.

**God is the Ocean** of all goodness and life. But all ***people are born CATS***. By nature we are independent, self-centered and rebellious. Yes, I am a dog person. When a person dies, they are thrust into the presence of God - they are plunged into the ocean of His holiness. If they remain a CAT, God’s glory and life will be death to them - they were not made to enjoy the ocean. But if Jesus has transformed you - then you are no longer a cat but have become a dolphin or a whale or a crafty octopus. As a new creation in Christ, God has fashioned you to enjoy His presence forever. He has designed you to experience His presence as life and joy and freedom, just as a dolphin experiences the ocean.

One more renewal in the new heaven and earth. God. Life and:

**What Will** **Be There:**

* **Blessing** (Reward)

“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.” Rev. 22:12

Flowing from God’s throne, carried in the water of God’s own life - will be blessings beyond imagination. Jesus promised treasure in heaven to those who work to store it up by serving Him. Jesus promised BLESSINGS for those who humbly call on Him. Look back in verse 4.

**What Will** **Be There:**

* **Blessing** (Reward)

“They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads… and they will reign forever and ever.” Rev. 22:4-5

The greatest blessings will be in **God Himself** - to see Him, to walk with Him, to be with Him - and to be marked by His own name. But there will be an ***infinite variety and unending supply of blessings*** every day and every moment of eternity, forever.

***We will REIGN with Jesus.*** There will be work to do. His Kingdom will endure forever. There will be new galaxies to explore. Star Trek will come true. There will be new adventures. There will be people from throughout history to connect with. Imagine the conversations! I think we’ll be able to not just replay every moment in history but possibly to enter those moments in a Matrix level virtual reality.

Does God know how to give **good gifts** to His children? We experience a small foretaste of His goodness and generosity in this life. How much more when we see Him face to face?

Brother, sister - hold onto this truth in God’s Word. ***Jesus is coming*** - SOON. When we hear that last trumpet and see His glory revealed, the joy will be beyond anything we have ever felt in this life. At the command of the Lord Jesus Christ, all evil and suffering will instantly end. Death itself will be undone at the resurrection. Our bodies will be upgraded to immortality, and the whole world will be upgraded - with God’s throne at the center, with His life flowing to every part of our experience and His blessings literally all around us - ripe for the picking.

**Richard Baxter** was a famous British preacher. He struggled with poor health and many other challenges throughout his long ministry. But a practice that helped him remain faithful, that helped him endure, was to think every day about HEAVEN. Make that your goal this week. Meditate on Revelation 21 and 22. Picture heaven. Feel the thirst now and imagine the satisfaction then.

This world is not our home. But Jesus is coming soon - to bring us home!

Let’s pray.